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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000542

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DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA (BGRAVES)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTIES COMMIT TO PEACEFUL SIERRA LEONE
PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF

REF: A. FREETOWN 508

- [1](#)B. FREETOWN 503
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Classified By: CDA Elizabeth Pratt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: President Kabbah joined All People,s Congress (APC) candidate, Ernest Bai Koroma, and Sierra Leone People,s Party (SLPP) candidate Vice President Solomon Berewa in issuing a joint statement affirming their commitment to a non-violent campaign and presidential run-off election. To highlight their commitment the two candidates are scheduled to hold a joint peace rally and ride in a motorcade through Freetown on September 6, the last official day of campaigning. There continue to be reports of isolated violence between SLPP and APC supporters as tensions remain high and the country awaits Saturday,s run-off ballot.

Koroma "Traumatized"?

[1](#)2. (SBU) The National Elections Commission (NEC), the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the Sierra Leone security services jointly sponsored a conference September 1 to address the role of the media on peace and security. President Kabbah addressed participants. Other speakers included NEC chairperson Christiana Thorpe, and Vice-President Berewa in his capacity as SLPP candidate. APC candidate Ernest Koroma was noticeably absent, but was represented by his spokesperson, Alpha Kanu, who, somewhat unfortunately, stated reports of SLPP followers attacking APC supporters with machetes had "traumatized" Koroma and left him unable to attend the conference.

Parties warned against using ex-combatants

[1](#)3. (U) In his address, Kabbah admonished the media to act responsibly and to avoid untruths which can lead to inciting violence. Both Kabbah and National Security Coordinator, retired Brigadier General Kellie Conteh, warned the political parties against using ex-combatants as security guards and made clear that only the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) were authorized to carry weapons, protect candidates, provide security and enforce election procedures. At the end, Kabbah suggested that the two competing candidates hold a joint peace rally and motorcade together through Freetown. The next day Berewa, Kabbah, and Koroma met to discuss the campaign and issued a joint

statement affirming their support for a non-violent electoral process. The candidates also announced that they would participate in the joint motorcade on September 6 (the last official campaign day). The event is now being called the "Support Peace March," to demonstrate that their political competition is not a war. Other peace marches will be held simultaneously throughout the country.

4.(U) During the morning conference 2,000 to 4,000 APC and SLPP supporters clashed in eastern and downtown Freetown near the SLPP headquarters. Individuals were seen carrying machetes and large sticks. According to reports, around two dozen persons were injured, though none seriously. The Sierra Leonean Police were able to control the violence using tear gas.

15. (U) Some of the media conference speakers also condemned scurrilous articles, mostly in Awareness Times, accusing UN electoral technical staff and observers of inappropriately interfering with the electoral process. While newspaper readership is limited, the articles were being reproduced and circulated throughout Sierra Leone. On August 30, UNIOSIL sent a letter to Awareness Times noting that the inflammatory and irresponsible accusations were in violation of the media code of conduct, "and put members of the international community at risk."

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ECOWAS Delegation Visit

16. (U) An ECOWAS delegation, led by Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, ECOWAS Commission president, including the Foreign Ministers of Nigeria and Burkina Faso, made a one day visit to Freetown on September 1 and attended the conference. In his address to the audience, Chambas commended the "disciplined" conduct of the August 11 elections and urged Sierra Leoneans to "desist from any acts likely to threaten the hard earned peace and stability of the country."

NEC announces Run-off Procedural Changes...

7.(SBU) Based on their experience in the August 11 election, the NEC announced several changes for the September 8th run-off. To help ensure the polls open on time, the NEC will pre-position and guard election materials at the polling stations the night before the vote. On election day, the SLP will enforce a NEC imposed 400-meter buffer zone around polling stations to deter loitering crowds of voters who have already cast their ballots. In order to promote full participation, the NEC will permit the SLPP and the APC to send two party agents each to every polling stations while the other political parties will be allowed one agent per station. Only the APC and SLPP agents will sign and receive a copy of the official tally sheet for the station they observe.

...and the SLPP raises a stink

18. (SBU) During the final Political Party Liaison meeting on September 5, the SLPP raised several objections to NEC procedures for the run-off. The NEC clarified that voters with valid GOSL-issued identification who appear on the registration list but do not have their voter registration card would be allowed to vote. This procedure was followed during the first electoral round on August 11. The SLPP

argued that the NEC,s determination violated the law. Although the NEC,s legal counsel clarified that the Sierra Leone Solicitor General had approved this policy, the SLPP representatives threatened to take their argument to court. The SLPP representatives also objected to the presence of party agents for the smaller parties that were no longer contesting the election.

NEC Official suspended

9.(U) On August 31, NEC Chairperson Thorpe suspended Mohammed Massaquoi, the NEC Logistics Officer, for two weeks, following a suspicious incident. Reportedly on August 27 Massaquoi, without the knowledge or approval of the NEC, accompanied a large group of SLPP officials to the airport where the NEC and political party agents were witnessing the arrival of ballot materials. Airport police, suspicious of Massaquoi,s arrival in non-NEC vehicles, notified of Dr. Thorpe of Massaquoi,s presence.

Comment:

10.(C) It is clear that the SLPP is extremely concerned about the possibility of losing the election to the APC and is scrambling in an effort to gain votes. Their repeated objections to relatively minor issues that did not have a clear impact on electoral transparency creates the appearance of desperation. The SLPP has already made some major missteps, such as their payments to "supporters" prior to August 11. Many Sierra Leoneans wondered how the cash was raised and which government program was raided.

11.(C) The effort to introduce calm in the run up to the elections seems to have had some success. The past two days have been relatively calm and the frequency of clashes seem to have subsided. However, anxieties continue. Certainly, there will be tension in the polling aftermath as the country waits for final results. An unofficial tally is likely to be known within at least 48 hours, but we expect the NEC to take, at a minimum, one week to certify results.
PRATT